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THREE SHORT

LETTERS

TO THE



People of England,

PROVING THE

PUBLIC GRIEVANCES

1790

COMPLAINED OF TO BE

I D E A L.

By the REVD. DR. JOHN TRUSLER.

Brother Citizens, &c.

IN the present disturbed state of the people, whose minds may have been misled by misrepresentation and false argument, permit me to interfere and explain matters in their true and proper light.

Our eyes have for some time past, been turned towards the French nation. They certainly had long been ruled by a rod of iron, and there is no wonder that they groaned under it. Their monarchy was despotic, the King and his Ministers could levy taxes without the consent of the people, they could imprison at pleasure; even

even without trial, and the privileges of their nobility were so great that they were almost as despotic as their monarch. As all men are upon an equality by birth-right, that is to say, as all men by nature have a claim to the same natural privileges, those who enjoy these privileges, as I shall shew we do, could not but exult at the spirit of the French, in throwing of the yoke they laboured under; and in new modelling their constitution, they have in general adopted that of the British.

Ours is a mild monarchical government, we dread not the tyranny or evils of despotism. We have a Magna Charta, that prevents fines being excessive or more than we are able to pay, so that no man need ever fear perpetual imprisonment; a habeas corpus act, which judges are obliged to attend to, to bring us before a court, and make us acquainted with the reasons of our imprisonment; our Judges are appointed for life, that they may be independant of administration; and we are tried for our offences, by a jury of our own countrymen. The life and property of every individual is secured by law, nor is there an injury, man can sustain either in his person, or his effects, that he cannot meet with redress in: I will allow that redress in some cases is expensive, and happy for us that it is so, for the litigious would always be at law. Our money is not taken from us but with our own consent, and we give our concurrence to every act of Parliament that passes.

If such be the blessings of our own government, what motive can we have to change it? It is idle to think of any change except for the better, and what security have we, if this government was a republican to-morrow, that we should have fewer placemen or less venality in Parlia-

ment? The business of administration must go on, and if there is any evil, it is in the people themselves, who put the members to such an expence for a seat in parliament, and chuse such mercenary representatives, that as Sir Robert Walpole used to say, they will not vote even according to their consciences without a reward. We have had patriot ministers, in the whig interest, who, though on their coming into office, set their faces against corruption, found nothing was to be done without it, and of course were in some measure, obliged to follow the steps of their predecessors. It is not my design here to point out where the remedy lies; it certainly does not lie in a change of our constitution. For whether there is a King or not, men in high office may have it in their power to use the public money improperly. I will now enquire into the nature of these oppressions we complain of.

Is our Government in general oppressive?—No. Has not the experience of the last hundred years taught us, that our government has been mild, and that administration has been continually struggling for the interest of the people at large? Does not every session of parliament produce fresh salutary laws, not laws of oppression, but laws to secure the ease and property of the subject, to encourage inventions, prevent scarcity and promote trade?

Has not all our commercial treaties had for their object, the good of this country?

Has not our wars, our interference with foreign states tended to the same end, namely to the peace of Europe and ultimately to our own peace?

If foreign wars and foreign connexions have increased the national debt; is it a debt that overloads us? Are

we not able to bear this debt?—Does not our stocks rise under it? And are we not, notwithstanding, in the highest credit both at home and abroad?

Is the national debt then a grievance?—No—I will admit it is owing to this, that we are taxed so high, in order to pay the interest of that debt, but it does not follow, that such taxes are a grievance. But for such taxes, every article of life would be cheaper. What then? If a labouring man who cannot live now for less than 20l. a year, could maintain himself for ten pounds, instead of receiving eighteen-pence a day for his labour, his employer would pay him but half the money: he would not be a shilling the richer. When the quartern loaf was sold for four-pence, a day labourer in the country had only ten-pence a day; now it is sold for 7d. he has sixteen-pence; He therefore suffers not by the dearth of provisions. Forty years ago, when the articles of life were forty per cent cheaper, the wages of a woman servant was three or four pounds, that of a man servant five or six pounds; now they are treble the sum. Every thing is advanced in equal proportion. Land, let at 5s. an acre at the time I speak of, is now let at 15s. and a load of wheat that then sold for 5l. will now fetch 10l. or 12l; and was, I say, the national debt paid off, and the nation required only a revenue of three millions instead of 15 millions, the consequence to the public would be worse than at present. Every thing would fall in its price, and the only benefit, if it can be so called, that the people would derive from it, would be a little more ease. The present dearth of things is a spur to industry and invention, and this I trust will be allowed to conduce to the health, the happiness and the wealth of individuals. Look at Spain, the exigencies of that government are drawn

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from their mines in America: when money is wanted, they do not levy taxes on the people; and what is the consequence? Articles of living are cheap, the people are idle, but they have little or no trade.

But surely idleness, which is the parent of evil and ill health can never be deemed a happiness. I need only appeal here to the busy and industrious, and ask them whether they are ever more unhappy than when time hangs heavy on their hands, and they have nothing to do?

The national debt, large as it is then, is no grievance; lessening it indeed might be attended with some advantage to the lower class of people, as it may enable the ministers to take off some of those taxes that more immediately affect that class. This our present minister with great credit to himself has been studying to do, and has done for some years past; but was the whole debt paid off, it would be an injury to this country instead of a benefit—In the first place, it would, as I have observed, by lowering the prices of the articles of living, tend to make the people idle, lessen our wealth and consequence, and make us less respectable in the eyes of the world. In the next place, if it requires ten millions of money to pay the interest of the debt, let us consider how many millions of people it tends to support, not only commissioners, tax-gatherers, clerks, &c. but those who have money in the funds. There is scarce a poor man but has some friend who has money there lodged. If the nation at large did not want to borrow money; how would those who have money to spare employ it? They might lend it to others on mortgage, who would often cheat them. Land they would not be able to purchase, for land-holders would live so much cheaper than they do now, that they would have no occasion to sell; in short,

short, the consequence would be, that the people, as I have said, would not be so industrious; the less money they wanted, the less they would work, and of course would not be so rich as they are.

On the same principle, the million of money annually allotted for the support of the Crown is no grievance; that money is spent in the country, for money cannot legally be carried out of it. Whatever property is sent out of the country, is sent in manufactures, for which the inhabitants have been paid, and of course have enjoyed the fruits of.

So again, though I am no advocate for squandering, suppose some money is idly or profusely expended by the state. This may be the case in the opinion of some, perhaps not so in that of others; but admit it—What then? All this money so spent reverts to the people again, in a thousand ways, it being spent in the country; and thus encourages arts, sciences, trade, manufactures and commerce. Besides, let this be ever such a grievance, it is not an object of that magnitude, as to make a change of constitution necessary to remedy it.

LETTER II.

Let me now ask, What are the great oppressions we complain of? Is it a standing army? We see the necessity of this. Its great and first use is to keep other nations in awe of us, who would otherwise overrun us, as did the Saxons and Danes formerly, and as the French have done Savoy and Brabant; its second use is to keep the violent and ungovernable in order, to enforce the laws made by ourselves for our own safety and security, and suffer the well disposed to enjoy their ease and property unmolested. We have seen this use of the army in the riots in London in the year 1780, and in the riots last year at Birming-

ham, where the mischief done fell upon the towns at large.

Quartering of soldiers on public-houses has been considered as oppressive; but as the profession of a publican is a continued bustle, a military inmate or two is scarce noticed among the crowd, and the expence the publican is put to, is paid by his customers; for whilst another tradesman is contented with 40 per cent. profit, the publican charges 80 per cent. and often more; so that the quartered soldier is fed by the guests that frequent that house.

In large, manufacturing towns, such as Birmingham, Coventry, &c. quartering of soldiers on public-houses, has been found for many political reasons improper. Administration, whose eyes are always open to the interests of the people, seeing this, have ordered barracks to be erected in such towns.

Are Tithes an oppression?—No. A tenth part of the produce of labour and cultivation, has been appropriated from the earliest ages of the world for the maintenance of the clergy, and where the farmer has not withheld this tenth, there has been no dispute between the Farmer and the Parson. Our Saviour enjoined his disciples to contribute to their support; if then they are to be paid by the Farmer, why not pay it in kind as well as in money? It saves the farmer the trouble of converting that kind into money. But the fact is, that it is not the farmer who pays the tithe, but his Landlord. When a farmer enters into treaty for a farm, he considers, or at least he ought to consider, not only the nature of the soil, what it will produce, what distance he has to carry it to market, but what tithe, what taxes he has to pay, what services his landlord requires of him, what restrictions he binds him to, what mischief he shall sustain

sustain by hunters, and what injuries are done him by the game and game laws. All these things he adds to the expence of cultivation, and the rent required; and then by calculating the produce of the land, he judges whether he shall be able to pay that rent and maintain himself and family; if not, he either gives a reduced rent or declines the farm. So that in fact it is his landlord, that pays both tithes, taxes and every other outgoing; for land that is tithe-free lets for more than land equally good that is not so.

By the same way of reasoning, every tax is paid ultimately by the monied men of this kingdom. Those who have no settled income must live. These live by their labour or their industry. If they are employed, as servants in mere manual labour, their wages are proportioned to the dearth or cheapness of the several articles of life, as I have before shewn: in this case, the taxes on such articles are paid by their employers. If a man lives by manufacturing goods, he, like the farmer, considers every expence he pays in such manufacturing, and puts a price upon the articles accordingly, so as to yield him sufficient profit to maintain himself: here also again the taxes are paid by the consumer, the monied man; so it is in house-rent. A house with 40l. a year with the taxes paid by the tenant, would fetch 60l. a year, if the taxes were paid by the landlord. It is the landlord then that pays the taxes; not the tenant.—Now if the monied men and men of landed property in this kingdom do not complain; why should the lower class, who are in no case the sufferers?

The same arguments will hold good with respect to the game, which has idly been considered as an oppression. Who, say they, has as good a right to the game upon a farm, as the farmer who feeds it? I have shewn that the

farmer does not feed it, but at the expence of his landlord; for if a country was as much overrun with foxes as it may be with partridges and hares, so that a farmer could not keep geese or poultry; if he thought proper to take a farm in such a country, he would pay a rent in proportion, and thus throw the grievance on his landlord. A landlord reserves the game to himself, as he does the timber; and every farmer knows that the headlands of a field abounding with timber, produce smaller crops than the more open parts of the same field, and why? Because such timber overshadows the land beneath and draws it, and their roots spreading out into the headlands draw their nourishment and are fed from such headlands. The farmer then feeds the timber on his farm, in the same manner as he does the game, and yet never presumes to have any claim upon the timber, when reserved to his landlord; nor yet makes complaint of any injury he sustains, when such timber is felled. The same reasoning is applicable to the game. The laws have reserved it for the benefit and diversion of the landholder and his friends. The poorer class of men are restrained from sporting, as labourers are from playing skittles and other games at public-houses, that nothing shall draw them off from their employs, to the detriment of their masters, their families and the state. The injury done by lords of manors, and their keepers on sown lands and in the destruction of fences, in the end falls on the owner of the soil, as he gets a less rent for it, in proportion to the mischief he does.

Why should the rich, say the envious poor, be allowed more recreation than us?—Because they can afford to waste part of their time, which the poor cannot. Why has one man more sense, more abilities than another?

ther? It is a gift and dispensation of Providence. Some are born to rule, some to serve. Was all mankind upon an equality, the order of things would be overthrown, and life could not go on. Our Creator has ordained that there shall be different ranks and degrees of men. It has been so from the beginning of time, and will continue to the end of it. It is not that a poor man is less respectable in *his* eyes than a rich man, if he acquits himself well in the state in which it has pleased God to place him; and a poor man never loses his consequence in society, but when he is disorderly and does not fulfil the office assigned him. A poor man is equally respectable in society also, if he is a useful member of it; and his equality with the rich is shewn and seen by his usefulness. As the servant cannot do without a master; so the master cannot do without a servant; a good servant is always as valuable to a master, as a good master is to a servant. They are equal in point of utility, as members of the same society, and subjects of the same state.

LETTER III.

I cannot suppose any man of common understanding can object to certain distinctions of rank: if titles please the possessors of them, why not indulge them in their fancies, when they tend not to the injury of society? They serve to distinguish old families, and when titles and honours are conferred for services to the state, they become rewards and encouragements to similar services. There might be political reasons for abolishing titles in France: the nobility there were, as I have observed, by their great privileges, exempt from certain laws that bound the rest of the people, and were almost as despotic as their monarch. Exalted then, and blown

up by their rank, they not only looked down on the common people with contempt, but often treated them contemptuously: in destroying therefore their privileges, it was thought prudent and politic to abolish their rank also, to put them on an equality with their fellow-citizens, and thus prevent any future attempts in them to exalt themselves again. With us, the case is different, our nobility are amenable to the same laws as the poorest man among us; they associate and inter-marry with commoners, and look up to commercial men with respect. Abolishing titles then or rank is an object of no moment, much less of that magnitude as to sacrifice our constitution to acquire it.

Are Manors and manerial rights oppressive? No. There are advantages in copyhold estates superior to freehold; if a man is disposed to lend a sum of money on such an estate; he can, by examining the court roll, see if it is free from incumbrances, as he can in the case of freeholds, in registered counties. If a copyholder pays a heriot at his death, and a fine on alienation, that fine by law, cannot exceed the custom of the manor, or two years rent of the estate, and in consequence of these exactions, he who buys a copyhold estate pays less for the purchase, than if the estate was free. But if a copyholder is disposed to pay the lord as much money as the estate would sell for more, if free; there are few lords of manors but would free such estates, and the copyholder might be a freeholder when he pleases. This considered, he has no more right to complain at not having a vote for the county, than the man who has no estate at all.

Is the Inequality of the land-tax an oppression?—No. He who purchased land where four shillings in the pound is paid, bought it at a less price than he

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he who purchased where six-pence only is paid. Every thing fetches its real value; of course there is no cause of complaint here.

Is the Inequality of representation an oppression?—No. There are large manufacturing towns, as Birmingham, Sheffield, &c. that send no members to Parliament, nor have they a wish to do it under the present mode of election, as it would create great confusion and disturbance in such towns. They conceive themselves safe in the choice of their countrymen, and will leave their property under the guardianship of the Parliament chosen by other people.

It is not my business here to enter into the venality and corruption of Parliaments, or to say how far a more equal representation, a more frequent choice of members, a more summary mode of election, or other reforms may be conducive to the greater happiness of the people. Such have been long wished for, and such a reform has been thought necessary even by the present administration. But there is a time for all things; the time to enter into this is certainly not the present, when the minds of the people are disturbed and when we are surrounded by tumult. When such a business is set about, quietness should reign among us, and the matter should be coolly and dispassionately discussed and adjusted. Was it to be entered into now, there is no knowing where things would end; it might end in the overthrow of the state.

Is the House of Lords an oppression?—No. "In the multitude of Counsellors there is safety." The Upper House consists of men of great landed property in this kingdom, who have a great deal to lose, and of course a great deal to guard; men high in honour and understanding;

of men well versed by education in the laws of this country, and of men equally so in the doctrines of christianity; and surely such an assembly of men is proper to revise the acts of the people at large, passed in the lower house of Parliament, that are to enact laws to secure our property and our religion. By our constitution they cannot make laws themselves, but they can either ratify or reject, and surely we may trust to them who are equally interested with us, and who have abundantly more at stake. If these men see no danger in the present system of things, we surely have no reason to be alarmed. They may say, as do the sailors on board a ship in a storm, to the passengers; Don't be afraid, look up to us—there is no occasion to be alarmed, till you see us so."

Is the Insolence of tax-gatherers, or the servants of government an oppression?—No. This, when it occurs, may be remedied by complaints made to their superiors in office; and any grievance an individual may labour under, by illegal seizure of his property, if unreasonable or unfair, is remedied by appeal.

I have now gone through every kind of complaint that the people have to urge, shewn the absurdity of those complaints, and that there is no shadow of a plea for a change in our constitution. Every thing cannot be done in a moment. Let us leave the remedies we wish to time, and the abilities of our representatives. Consider what would be the consequence of a commotion,—not only a great deal of bloodshed, but a great deal of domestic wretchedness in every family; distress would overspread the land, and slaughter cloathe the whole country in *black*. Cast your eyes on the French nation—the people there are become warriors—there are few, if any, left to cultivate the land, and

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if their importation of provisions and the necessaries of life was interrupted and stopped by foreign powers, as in all likelihood it may, they must be starved into compliance. Look to their manufacturing towns; we are told that at Lyons there are 30,000 manufacturers, infirm men, women and children, who cannot carry arms, starving for want of employ; so it will be with us.—There is not a man in trade, but should an insurrection take place, would immediately feel a loss, and of course his family would feel a want; and as to the men of property, those who have most to

lose would be the greatest sufferers. If then, my fellow-countrymen, you value your own ease and comfort; if your wives and children are dear to you, do not sacrifice the whole in search of a phantom you never can grasp. Listen not to the misguided opinions of those whose ignorance is the best excuse for their conduct. Things have gone on very well since we have lived in the world, and there is little doubt but that they will do the same whilst we continue in it. The quieter a man passes thro' life, the happier he is.

J. TRUSLER.

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